FORUM

ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE, ZIONISM AND ISRAEL



"A great problem—perhaps the greatest
—is the problem of the Arabs and without
a persistent effort to win them over
to mutual trust and bonds of reciprocity
there will be no security."

Document

A Sentimental Journey —

Early Zionist Activities in The South — The Diary of Jacob de Haas' Trip in 1904

David Geffen

"My trip through the south is for the purpose of stirring up further interest in the Zionist work which has made rapid strides in this section in the last few years....You might call it a world stirring tour. In the last few years great progress has been made in the south, but to further interest people in the work, I have come off my New York shelf and am visiting the principal cities of the south."

This description by Jacob de Haas, reported in the *Atlanta Journal*, defined the purpose of his month-long trip, the first ever made into the heartland of southern Jewry in the United States. From November 28, 1904 until January 2, 1905 de Haas, as Secretary of the Federation of American Zionists, made his "world stirring trip" through fifteen cities in seven states. His efforts resulted in the formation of new groups, the enrollment of new members, and the beginning of a better understanding of Zionism by Southern Jews and Christians.

Jacob de Haas was born in London in 1872 of Dutch parentage. Quite early he appeared destined for a literary career. In fact in his twenties he established his journalistic credentials and became editor of the *Jewish World* in London. When Theodor Herzl visited England in 1896 to secure the aid of British Jewry in the founding of the Zionist movement, de Haas was quite moved by him and became the major advocate of Herzlian Zionism in Great Britain. De Haas served as Herzl's unofficial English secretary, and in 1900 he was in charge of the Fourth Zionist Congress held in London. In 1902 de Haas came to the United States to serve as the editor of *The Maccabaean*, iournal of the Federation of American Zionists, and upon his arrival in America he was also chosen as the secretary of the Federation. After leaving the Federation in 1905, he moved to Boston where he served as editor of the *Jewish Advocate*. His explication of Zionism to Brandeis was one of the factors that helped bring the Justice into active Zionist work. Jacob de Haas served the Zionist cause throughout his lifetime and died in Boston in 1937.

When he began his work with the Federation in 1902, de Haas discovered that the participation in the Zionist cause in the states south of Baltimore was quite minimal. In fact there were only eight affiliated Zionist groups in the South. They had a total enrollment of about one

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David Geffen, Ph.D., is Educational Director of the Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem. Dr. Geffen, the founder of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, now lives in Jerusalem. His last contribution to *Forum* appeared in Issue 30-31.

hundred and fifty members out of a total Jewish population in that area of just over 60,000. However, de Haas had been too involved with Zionist work in the main Jewish centers in the northeastern part of the United States to take time out from his work to go south.

The one who finally convinced de Haas to go to "Dixie Land" was George Tunkel of Augusta, Georgia. Tunkel, a member of the Federation, had attended the Fourth Zionist Congress in London as a delegate from the United States. Since that time he had been working diligently in Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama spreading the Zionist message. His enthusiasm about the potential of the movement in the South persuaded de Haas to set up an extensive trip throughout this virgin area.

Since de Haas was an inveterate note taker, he kept a fairly comprehensive diary of his trip, which he published in *The Maccabaean* in the month following his trip. The significance of the diary is fourfold. First, it deals explicitly with the recruitment of Southern Jews into the Zionist movement, the personalities involved in the movement, and a minor effort to attract the support of sympathetic Christians in the south, whose Fundamentalism inclined them to a Zionist posture. The second attribute of this document is the description it gives of the religious, cultural, and philanthropic aspects of Jewish life in the South. This is the earliest such description by a knowledgeable Jewish visitor to that section of the country. Third, the opinions that de Haas expresses about the shortcomings in American Jewish life and the remedies he proposed are as valid today as they were 75 years ago. Finally, the diary is one of the primary building blocks in writing the history of Zionism in the south.

This diary is found in the *Maccabaean* Vol. VIII - I pp. 22-31.

MR. DE HAAS' TOUR

Mr. de Haas has been keeping a record of his town, (own) citing the many instances of hospitality, and giving vivid pictures of the work of our fellow Zionists, in their efforts to take advantage of Mr. de Haas' presence to stimulate the movement. We shall give here a few entries that appear in his record, omitting a few for lack of space:

Portsmouth, Nov. 28.—Stepping on board a vessel two hours before dawn this morning, at Cape Charles,[1] seemed in the blackness of the night and the turgidity of the almost motionless water, like a trip upon the famous Styx. The masses of sheer black offered nothing to view, so I recomposed myself to sleep, only to be awakened in the grey, cold dawn, by a Yiddish voice proclaiming that its owner was fairly lost as to which harbor constituted his destination. Did I snore in a Jewish key, that I was thus routed out from beneath the folds of my coat? And this constitutes the incident of the day. Portsmouth is the Brooklyn of Norfolk, and possesses a synagogue four or five times larger than its present needs. Thanks to the energy of Mr. Lasting and Mr. Saks, I was able to address the local Zionists in the vestry of that synagogue. Over one hundred assembled, literally of all ages, and natives of many parts of Europe. The local organization needs reorganization, the ladies' societies are in a better condition than the men's societies, there is excellent material to go upon; but ideas, methods and moral support must come from the south-eastern Council. The Hebrew tuition needs re-inforcing by a history class, and the establishment of a reading circle.

Newport News, Nov. 29.—But one hour's distance by trolley and ferry, this

city offers vastly different aspect to Portsmouth. Once past the straggling outskirts, one enters a well-kept broad and prosperous-looking city, with Jewish names over the principal stores in the chief business street. It is not a big community, about one hundred families, but markedly intelligent, and to it, so the mayor and the ex-mayor avow, the city owes much of its success. Every form of Jewish institution has its counterpart in Newport News. The whole seems well disciplined, and German Jews, Russian Jews, English Jews, and the non-Jewish population live together on intimate and friendly terms. All these elements turned into the synagogue to hear me. The Rev. Mr. Schwartz[2] and Mr. Greenblatt, of the Jewish Daily News, who has exerted himself considerably to make my stay in this section comfortable, and successful for the cause, sang two verses of The Hatikvoh [sic], whereafter I presented our problems to an audience that followed me word for word for about eighty minutes. The really notable success of this meeting is due to Mr. Ast, the founder and prime mover of local Zionism. Later I was the guest of the Y.M.H.A., of which Mr. Stein is the enthusiastic director, a new institution, owning a fine home in which a banquet was served, and which has prefixed to its description the name of Dr. Herzl. Mr. Peyser made an excellent toastmaster. Six Jews and four Christians, the latter paying tribute to the integrity of our local coreligionists, delivered rattling speeches under a ten-minute rule, whilst joining the name of the institution to the portrait of our dear chief. I dilated on his life and his teachings. It was a well spent, and I may claim, a successful day.

Richmond, Nov. 30.—Failure. The Jews are so spread over the city, the power of organization so weak, that the nearest I got to Zionism to-day was a long chat with the secretary, Mr. Fisher, who confessed that all the work accomplished here by Mr. Abramowitz, who is now in Youngstown, has practically gone to pieces. I heartened him to a revival, and regretted that my plans did not enable me to stay a week in which to endeavor at least to re-organize our forces. Yet in the dark picture of this rare day, I found one little consolation, a uniformed messenger boy, whom I had occasion to employ, was a Jew, and though probably as ignorant as the average street arab, he recognized that my button had what he called Yiddish letters and therefore he was compelled to exert his Jewish freedom and ask me why I wore a Yiddish badge. So our button is a useful form of propaganda.

Charleston, S.C., Dec. 3.—Our local organizers here missed an opportunity which, however, must go on record. Rabbi Elzas[3] had offered for my use the pulpit of his Temple. Next time that offer will be accepted. I lectured Friday night at a meeting of the Y.M.H.A., which here endeavors to bridge the gulf between up and downtown, and had a mixed audience. Rabbi Elzas was in the audience, but did not see his way clear to open a discussion. Some time ago he debated the question with Mr. Tunkle,[4] of Augusta, that was his last word on the subject. The Chasan's (sic) singing of the first three verses of the Hatikvoh (sic) suggested my theme, the Jewish hope, the varying types of Jews and their several hopes, the hope to which the poet referred and its historical, religious and moral justification. On Sabbath I lectured after Mincha in the Synagogue, quoting the Sedra, and Haphtorah of the day, with their varying dreams, and describing what the Zionist movement has done towards the accomplishment of its dreams. There was again a mixed but smaller audience, and at the close I had the satisfaction of having my

appeal met by a request from boys as to whether they might meet and form a society. The society meets regularly this Sunday and proposes to be stirred to new activity through my visit.

Savannah, Dec. 9. (sic an obvious typo)—I entered this Southern city in the morning in a sanguine mood. Savannah, as the records of the Federation testify, has recently done considerably for the cause, and it was the first to encourage this tour. It is a city of palms, space, brightness, and a deputation offered me at the depot a hearty welcome, such as has been the case everywhere. This evening, having during the day received the officers of the three societies, I lectured in the synagogue to an audience that filled every corner of the building, and this gathering included Dr. Solomons[5] of the Reform Temple, the father and brother of Rabbi Joseph Silverman[6] of New York, and other members of the non-Zionist wing. I described the movement, and discussed assimilation, and touched on Jewish nationalism, and considerable discussion of a semi-public kind took place between the opposition and myself afterwards. I have promised for this same element to discuss the question of historic nationality on Tuesday evening. The President of the Society, Mr. George Lewin, was in the chair. The local Chasan [sic] sang at the opening "Tamuni Zion," a choir from the girls' society sang "Dor wo die Zedern," and I was introduced to the audience by Mr. Tunkle, of Augusta, Ga., who travelled here to assist at the local functions.

Savannah, Dec. 5.—To-day I enjoyed the hospitality of the local Zionists, which was extended to me on a lavish scale, but they can do all kinds of remarkable things in this city, for it is an unique Jewish community. This evening I delivered an address under the auspices of the Shoshanas Zion. These young ladies, who brought a most interesting audience together, provided a simple, but most effective programme. Largely an audience of non-Zionists, I felt I had before me the people whom I wanted to convert, and I swung into my speech with zest. I described the Jewish brotherhood which Zionism is creating, the measure of love and sacrifice it is calling forth, and pleaded for support on the basis of Jewish pride and dignity. I was happy to see a flush pass from face to face as my words rang out and afterwards to receive from many sides the admission that my presentation of our cause had won their sympathy and promise of support.

Savannah, Dec. 6.—Visited the Mission School of the Jewish Women's Council[7] and briefly, at their request, addressed the ladies present. This evening I close my visit here with a lecture on Jewish nationality. I owe a word of gratitude for all kindness shown here, to testify to the graciousness of our sisters in Zion, and to the enthusiasm of all our officers here, who fully come up to the Pittsburg [sic] standard.

Augusta, Ga., Dec. 7.—This morning early I left Savannah, with the good wishes of our enthusiastic officers. Last night I completed my task in the city of palmettos, and a remarkable round of duties it was. In the morning I visited the Mission School of the Jewish Women's Council and briefly addressed the zealous ladies who have charge of it, and after a day of sight-seeing and entertainment, addressed a large audience, gathered from all sections of the city, on the history of the Jewish National Idea, presenting evidence in favor of our contention that the Jews are a nation. This long lecture was well received and many promises were made by those who have hitherto held aloof that they would now support the movement. Thereafter I was entertained at the residence of Mr. and

Mrs. Stark by the officers of the two societies in right royal fashion.

Here in Augusta the arrangements had gone awry. Mr. Tunkle had arranged that I should address a meeting in the Reform Temple, but during his absence the arrangement was upset by our local committee, and so tonight I spoke in the Orthodox synagogue. I dealt largely with the idea that Zionism is considered impossible and the appreciation came mostly from the younger folk.

Augusta, Ga., Dec. 8.—This evening I spoke in the Reform Temple. The audience was not large, but it included a number of Christians, and I presented some of the ideal considerations of Zionism.[8]

Atlanta, Ga., Dec. 11.—Owing to physical fatigue, and the pressure of Mr. Tunkle, I gave over my anticipated visit this Sunday to Chattanooga, offering the local organization the next or a later date, and spent Friday, Sabbath and Sunday here, and these notes are written in what is yet to be the dawn of Monday. The society of this city looked even at a first glance, at the depot on Friday, strong and masculine, and I found it full of vim and heartiness. I lectured on Friday night, and again to-day in the Orthodox synagogue,[9] but at this second lecture a good number of those who had never heard of Zionism put in an appearance. This morning (besides visiting an excellent Hebrew school) I attended the second of the Sunday services held here and heard Rabbi Gries[10] discuss both the Sabbath and the present Jewish position. The Temple was full, and this smug respectability, with the light shining through the faces, in the stained glass windows, of the great Jewish prophets and the women of the Bible, moved me deeply. The contrast between that inertia which we so often complain of, which there was as transparent as the faces of the prophets, and the hundreds of bright faces at our meeting inspired me to more than my usual effort, and what I had to say spun itself out for an unconscionable time. But the story of the Illui gripped the audience, and afterwards a ladies' society was organized. The Y.M.H.A. having notably contributed to the success of the meeting, a reception was held there, where I again spoke and afterwards was entertained at a wine supper, and, at 5. a.m., I am off for Montgomery. Mr. Tunkle, who has had me in his charge from Savannah, deserves all the praise he gets, has spoken at nearly every one of the meetings and always with a quaint humor, and an exact knowledge of local conditions—lies sleeping peacefully on the couch in the room in which I am writing; he does not even hear the click of this machine, though he roused himself once to tell where I could find some National Fund stamps; he thoroughly deserves the rest that he can take during the next few days when he is rid of the peripatetic Zionist.

Montgomery, Ala., Dec. 12.—At one leap from a big to a small city, yet a Zionist with a button was at the depot to meet me, and a few moments later I had met a Jew, a Ben B'rith for that matter, who seemed to think that somehow Zionism and Christian Science must be related. Verily the Southern Rabbis have promulgated strange ideas amongst the people. The next person I met, a Jewess, came out with the stock question, must we all go back to Palestine. I am not discouraged, but I do not rate the intelligence of our people as high as I once did, and what is needed for them is a real mission, a band of wanderers who shall go from house to house throughout the land explaining our simple teachings. And it is indeed good to come here, to such a small city, to meet a handful of Zionists, who brought the idea with them from Russia, and who will not permit materialism to

overcome them. Such a little group may be wanting in all the knowledge and experience that goes to successful organization, but the heart is in the right place, and the visitor can do two things, which the smaller the organization, the more reason it should be done, that is, by his presence encourage the workers and make things clear to them, and by the fact of his visit make clear that they are not an isolated handful struggling against odds, but part and parcel of Jewry in a real and actual sense. My tour till now has convinced me of the correctness of many old theories, and more than that it offered me a conclusion, that the Zionists have a mighty big task before them in making the movement known throughout the length and breadth of the country. The maggidim, I am sorry to say, have not made the real drift of the movement known; they stirred the people to a very vague thought, so that every detail has to be explained; the Yiddish press has not made the problem clear, and the English reading Jews depend upon a press, in so far as they read it, which largely misrepresents us. Ignore for a moment a few Zionists in every city who follow the movement closely, and a few communal officials, who are more or less compelled to keep in touch with the passing facts of Jewish life, and there is left a dense mass of ignorance about all things Jewish, and of the moment. The Jewish papers are largely read in many cases almost exclusively, for their social columns, so that there is a tremendous leeway to make good. I cannot in the hurry scurry of this tour propound a remedy, and I am afraid of the cost of any scheme, but I call the attention of every earnest Zionist to the fact that we have not only to make Zionists of hundreds of Jews, but that there are thousands of Jews whom we must endeavor somehow to save as Jews for their own sakes, and the sake of the house of Israel. If Reform were wise it would save itself and its congregations by spreading the stirring message of Zionism from every one of its pulpits; where Orthodoxy places itself in the hands of the young men, and gives at least a welcome to the movement, as it generally does, its strength is already saved for a generation. Our meeting here was held in the rather dingy room which is ordinarily used as a synagogue, but nevertheless over one hundred men and women managed to crowd into that small space, and the most attentive of listeners was the Rev. Dr. Messing[11] and the teachers of his Sunday School. The conditions under which we met afforded me the opportunity of developing my theme from the first meeting of English Zionists under similar conditions years ago. A number of new members were enrolled.

New Orleans, La., Dec. 14-18.—The Zionist movement has much to learn, and much to teach. There are probably three hundred possible centers still to be conquered by us, and they must be won over, not only for the sake of the cause, but for the sake of Judaism itself. New Orleans is such a one, a wonderfully interesting problem, and only half of it can be told. My visit began with a reception late at night at the depot on the part of four ardent workers, and on the next day by a most cordial and interesting discussion with Dr. Heller, at once a philosopher of Reform, and of Zionism.[12] The Zionists have a Dr. Herzl Memorial Library, and here I addressed, in very nice rooms, the men's and the girls' society on different evenings. It was pleasant to come home, Zionistically speaking, and to spend an evening on some of our more recondite problems, and it is to be regretted that the Zionists of other cities have not given a more sympathetic response to the call for books and funds for this library. The struggle is an unusually hard one here. The movement is guided by

the firm orthodox, a mere handful, which keeps the girls' society somewhat at a distance, and finances are not too plentiful.

But I was not satisfied with merely addressing the converted, I desired to get at the other side, and Dr. Heller was with me in the idea, but New Orleans is positively afraid of Zionism. It contains some Marrano Zionists, and I believe that I was able to influence, somewhat, those with whom I came in contact, but not a Jewish institution would open its doors to the advocate of a Jewish movement. The local Y.M.H.A. was broad enough to listen to Christian Science, but Zionism—the Board has a standing injunction, I mean resolution, against it, and Dr. Heller's position is not the more comfortable in that he is an avowed exponent of the cause. So I contented myself with a public address at which Dr. Heller presided, and to which none but our Russian friends and their children came. Now to people who are so wrapped up in the old ghetto spirit that they literally shiver at the mention of Zionism, we Zionists have a mission—to teach them a little courage, and to prove to them that we are living in a free world, where, whatever your neighbor thinks of you, he will not hate you because you express an opinion on Jewish matters. We will have to teach that truth, and we must open the minds of the people by dealing with the verities of existence, which are miles and miles removed from that mass of theologic discussion, and homelitic [sic] debate which is passing for Judaism.

Beaumont, Tex., Dec. 19.—My first visit to a boom town, but my interest lay chiefly in spending the day with an old comrade in arms, the Rev. J. Friedlander, who from the suburb of an oil city overlooks modern Jewry, and observes it with refreshing closeness.[13] Despite the Christmas week, a meeting was held here, and Dr. Friedlander's patient sowing bore fruit, and at the end of an hour's talk, a society was founded here, with a promise of about fifty members, and the congregation a Reform one.

And here let me observe, I do not find that the Reform Jew is per se an Anti-Zionist; in most cases he is so out of respect for his Rabbi, mostly because he has not the faintest notion as to its objects. And Reform is not a matter of religion either with the individual Jew. It is one part American conditions, and the other social caste. It is the proper thing, when the orthodox reach that affluence which shall permit them to aspire socially, to do so without hesitation, though they do not seem to get the reward they seek, the Bavarian Jew, who forms the backbone of many of these congregations, maintaining his contempt for what he calls the "Bollack." I can write that in Beaumont (for none of these conditions prevail here), the Reformers are all Russians, or descended from them.

Houston, Tex., Dec. 21.—Here again where the lines are not finer drawn I was, I believe, able to do good work for the cause. The Zionists have some strength; they are agitating for a Council for Texas, and they number men of real resource. They brought a large audience together, the presiding officer being Rabbi Barnstien,[14] who, as a pupil of Dr. Gaster, was not only sympathetic, but whose study class was diligently reading Dr. Herzl's Jewish State. Under such conditions it was not difficult to make an impression, and the position of the society was materially strengthened by the propaganda my visit afforded. I was, I confess, surprised at the general high intellectual tone of this community. It is face to face with many difficult problems, and the interest in them was keen and clear which is more than one can say for many more

northerly situated communities. How can I help remarking on the adaptability of our people—A grocer riding on horseback in perfect Texan style and a few years ago he was in a Russian slum.

Galveston, Dec. 22.—The effects of the great disaster which made Galveston famous in 1900 are writ more or less on every face here, nevertheless it is the most unique community in the country, for a species of purely English Judaism prevails, and in this city from which Leo N. Levi came all the Jews may be said truly to be Zionists in spirit though the minority only believe in our actual Zionism. A great deal of this seems due to Rabbi Cohen,[15] who is sanely orthodox, and has the unqualified confidence of the orthodox. The Zionists are to-day a mere handful, and yet amongst them I met one, the Treasurer of the society, who was present at Dr. Herzl's funeral. The world is a very small place and Zionism a very big movement.

I have been twenty-four days on tour and have delivered twenty-four addresses.

Waco, Tex., Dec. 25.—After the continual whirr and excitement of this trip. I resolved to spend the Sabbath far from the hum of friends, far, if possible, from the routine of my work, in order to renew my energies. I snugged away into a little Texan town, but though I did not come into contact with any of our people, I found their names written over stores even in a little city of no more than four thousand souls. And so I begun [sic] a cautious inquiry into the Jewish settlements in this portion of Texas. And I found that almost every town on the route between Houston and Waco had its little collection of Jews, from a single family to twenty or twenty-five, whose spiritual affairs are being more or less ministered to by the scheme of circuit Rabbis initiated by the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis, and though this work has only just begun, whoever gets an insight into the peculiar lives of our people in these naturally estranging places, cannot but help recognizing the usefulness of this kind of work, even though it be but of the most scanty character. The orthodox Jew is allowed to shift for himself, there is no organization to strengthen his consciousness, and in the long run orthodoxy in the South is more a matter of opinion than a matter of practice. Another general reflection has come upon me as a result of my experiences on this tour, and that is that our people are far too ready to land themselves communally into debt in order to build synagogues and temples, than to give sufficient heed to the problem of Jewish education. Even in the best places, education seems to be regarded as a secondary matter, Jewishly speaking, and it has occurred to me that the educational work begun at the Pittsburg convention must be spread by the creation of Zionist Councils in these ways and means of dealing with a problem the urgency of which is readily admitted on every side. So my Sabbath was spent in very serious thought. The lighter feature of the day was provided by a local newspaper in which I read that a Rabbi had made a brilliant, and witty speech at a "possum and 'tater supper." It seemed so unique, so bizarre, from what we consider ordinarily to be Jewish life, and yet I felt that it was all so natural here, that I was not at all surprised when I was this morning introduced to that same Rabbi as Dr. Wohlberg, the Rabbi of Waco, and a Zionist.[16] Our local organizers had battled against Christmas Day, which hereabouts is much fireworks and crackers, and had gathered the audience in the Progress Club, which had once been a Y.M.H.A. The number present were more than I had anticipated, and I was able to loop my address around the fact that the Chasan [sic] sang a Zion song

in a minor key, whilst a young lady sang in a more hopeful air a ballad of the coming of spring. In the afternoon I met all the local officers and discussed with them at length the future work of their organization.

San Antonio, Tex., Dec. 26.—The reader of these lines can hardly be as interested in that name as myself. But from the day I began this diary the city of San Antonio has been in my mind, first because it contains one of the youngest of our organizations, and to myself it would mean the southern extremity, and the middle date of my journey. When I got here by the always overdue Texan train I knew that I was 1900 miles from New York, and that I had traveled over 2,500 miles in getting there. Nor was this long journey unrewarded. I had already met one San Antonian Zionist in Waco, and was struck by his highly intelligent enthusiasm, and have since found this to be characteristic of the local Zionism, and I believe that much future strength will come to our movement from this far southern city. My individual host was Dr. Burg, the City Physician, whom I mention—I have more often than not ignored mention of all those who have shown me courtesy, because considering their great number my diary might have become a list of names, and words of thanks—but I mention Dr. S. Burg because I discovered in him one of the original members of that same Viennese Kadimah which founded our modern movement and from whose ex-members were drawn practically all the members of the Vienna Actions Comite, and the working staff of the Vienna Bureau. Yes, here were the portraits of friends when they were still students, and here in this Spanish American city was the man during whose regime over the Burschenschaft, the Jewish student in Europe first guarded the honor of his nationality with a sword. I repeat what I have written before the world is very small and Zionism a very great movement. My address was given in the local Temple, a beautiful building, the organ playing a prelude. I was introduced by Rabbi Marks, who after I had spoken on lines suggested by his opening remarks, the mystery of the revival of the Rose of Sharon, blessed the congregation, blessed me and my work, from which I take it that the movement is in his opinion worthy of blessing. I am sorry not to have been able to devote more time to San Antonio, but Fort Worth is on Texan trains a long way off. Indeed I have been riding close upon twelve hours already to-day in the hope of keeping my engagement this evening, and these pages are being typed whilst the Santa Fe jogs through prairie and cotton-fields.

St. Louis, Mo., Jan. 2.—Considerable has happened since I jotted my last installment of this diary on the train to Fort Worth. I reached there that evening, but too late for the meeting, a train wreck having intervened between me and my prompt arrival. So I gave over my task for that night, but on the following evening kept my appointment in Dallas. Here too some misunderstanding had taken place, but despite the scratch character of the gathering, and that it was the first cold night of year, over one hundred persons assembled in the synagogue and I was promised that as a result of my address new life would be put into the local organization.OnThursday evening I gave my postponed address in Fort Worth, where quite a Zionistic spirit prevails, and the local Rabbi, Dr. Jason[17] introduced me. Being anxious to make Little Rock before Sabbath next day, I had asked the audience to assemble as early as 7 o'clock and this it did promptly, and the general impression of the meeting was favorable to the cause.

The plans of man and mice "oft gang agly." I was not to reach Little Rock on Friday. A collision put me two hours behind schedule, and all attempts to signal trains and get ahead on locals ended in the breaking of my innocent typewriting machine, and myself left on a dark night in a wayside place called Altheimer. Minus my grip I however managed to get to Little Rock late on Saturday evening, and was met by a host of local Zionists to whom telegrams had reached in inverse order of transmission. It was a real game of Box and Cox between me and my destination. I, however, got there and last night addressed a large meeting which listened with great interest to a detailed story of the movement. Here, and in Houston, where the only occasions on which my offer to answer questions was taken up, and the questioner being satisfied promised to join us. A young girl recited a remarkable poem of her own composition. There is better poetry in the world but I believe we have in that little girl and her intelligent understanding of Judaism a budding genius. And so I arrived here without further mishap, and in the belief that no more trains can baffle me keeping all my appointments.

NOTES

Editor's note: The text has been reproduced precisely as it appeared in The Maccabaean of January, 1905.

[1] The ferry across Cape Charles, where the Chesapeake Bay enters the Atlantic Ocean, connected the northern peninsula of Virginia with the Virginia mainland. That ferry operated into the sixties.

[2] Rabbi Tobias H. Schwartz was the Rabbi of *Congregation Adath Yeshurun* in Newport News Virginia. Born in 1863 in Kovna he received his *semicha* from Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan Spektor, and he came to Virginia as a rabbi in 1899.

[3] Rabbi Barnett A. Elzas (1867-1939) was born in Germany, and then moved to England with his family, where he was ordained at Jews College. He became the Rabbi of *Beth Elohim*, the reform congregation in Charleston, South Carolina in 1894. His research in local Jewish history resulted in the important volume *Jews of South Carolina: From Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Elzas was a noted anti-Zionist in the classical reform sense.

[4] George Tunkel was a Hebrew teacher in Augusta, Georgia, and he served on the National Executive Council of the Federation of American Zionists. He advocated representation for all American Zionist groups in the World Zionist Congress, and he spoke on the issue at the Congress he attended in London. Marnin Feinstein, *American Zionism 1884-1904* (New York, 1965), p. 191. Avyatar Friesel, *The Zionist Movement in the United States 1897-1914* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1970), pp. 55, 235.

[5] Rabbi George Solomon was the Rabbi of *Congregation Mikveh Israel* In Savannah, Georgia. Born in 1873 in New York City, he was ordained as a reform rabbi at the Hebrew Union College. After serving in several other southern communities, he came to Savannah in 1903.

[6] Rabbi Joseph Silverman was the Rabbi of *Temple Emanuel* in New York, and at this point he as an avowed anti-Zionist. Later he became an avid Zionist, the second leading spokesman for the movement in reform Judaism after Stephen Wise.

[7] The National Council of Jewish Women was organized in 1894, and because of its Reform orientation it had many chapters throughout the south where the majority of Jews were affiliated with Reform Temples.

[8] The following description in a Georgia newspaper helped bring Christians to de Haas' lectures. "He is an eloquent orator, enthused with the spirit of his mission, and speaks English that is forcible and direct and by means of which he makes his purpose clear enough to be understood even by those who are not members of the Jewish nation."

[9] The *Ahavat Achim* synagogue was the main stronghold of Zionism in Atlanta. It was known as the Gilmer street synagogue in that period in contrast to *Shearith Israel*, the Hunter street synagogue.

[10] Rabbi Moses Gries (1868-1918) was the Rabbi of *Temple Tifereth Israel* in Cleveland, Ohio. He was a guest of the Rabbi of the Atlanta Temple, David Marx. Marx had invited Gries, a leading national advocate of Sunday services for Reform Temples, to be his guest speaker at the first Sunday services ever held at the Temple on the day de Haas spoke.

[11] Rabbi Abraham Joseph Messing was the Rabbi of *Temple Beth-Or* in Montgomery, Alabama. Born in 1873 in Chicago, Illinois, he was ordained at the Hebrew Union College, and came to Montgomery as a rabbi in 1897.

[12] Rabbi Maximillian Heller (1860-1929) was Rabbi of *Temple Sinai* in New Orleans, Louisiana from 1886 until his death. With a thorough background in Jewish scholarship, Heller was a prolific writer in many fields, especially Bible, and he was one of the leading writers for the Zionist cause in America. However, he was reluctant to have de Haas come to New Orleans. Hence de Haas wrote him on November 14, 1904: "I do not say that I insist upon coming to New Orleans, but I believe that no time is a good time. People have always to be coerced somewhat. . . .I believe that the 'boom' method, in which I am about to conduct this rush campaign, will stir even New Orleans. . . .To teach the truth, one has always to fight; and I am perfectly well aware that no one is a prophet in his own city. Often I think that explains a whole lot of the Jewish past, as well as of the Jewish present." Papers of Maximillian Heller, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[13] Rabbi Joseph Friedlander was the Rabbi of *Congregation Emanuel* in Beaumont Texas. Born in 1855 in Edinburgh Scotland he was educated at Jews' College in London. He was an assistant minister in Victoria, Australia, and then he returned to England, where he was secretary for Hermann Adler Chief Rabbi of England, as well as being Secretary of the English Zionist Federation.

[14] Rabbi Henry Barnstien was Rabbi of *Congregation Beth Israel* in Houston, Texas. Born in 1868 in Dover, England, he was educated at Jews' College in London and received his Ph.D. at the University of Heidelberg. He was ordained by Haham Moses Gaster, the Cahief Sephardic Rabbi of England. Barnstien was a prolific writer, and he published an edition of the *Targum Onkelos* according to a Yemenite manuscript.

[15] Rabbi Henry Cohen (1863-1952) was not Orthodox but Reform, the Rabbi of *Congregation B'nai Israel* in Galveston Texas. Born in London he studied at Jews' College, and he served as a rabbi in Jamaica before coming to the United States. From 1888 until his retirement he was a rabbi in Galveston. After the terrible hurricane in Galveston, on the Gulf of Mexico, Rabbi Cohen won nationwide prominence for his relief efforts after the disaster. In 1907 he became involved in the "Galveston Plan" to divert Eastern European immigrants to the interior of the United States. The Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau which he headed found new homes for 10,000 Jewish immigrants between 1907 and 1914.

[16] Rabbi Berenhard Wohlberg was Rabbi of *Congregation Rodef Sholom* in Waco, Texas. Born in Breslau Germany in 1866 he was ordained by Rabbi Dr. Hildescheimer. He held positions in other southern states and in Canada and before coming to Waco in 1902.

[17] Rabbi Joseph Jasin was a rabbi in Fort Worth from 1904 to 1908. Born in Brest Litovsk, Russia in 1883 he immigrated with his family to the United States and was ordained at the Hebrew Union College. From 1908 to 1910 he was the Executive Secretary of the Federation of American Zionists, and in 1910 he was the founder of the Jewish National Fund Bureau of America.

"They are all gone now, of course; they and their children and their children's children; they and their way of life. The *shtetl* of Eastern Europe has gone too, destroyed in flames, its memory preserved accurately only in the Yiddish literature to which it gave birth and through which it expressed itself. That shtetl, reconstructed in novels and films, which has become known today in places my grandparents never even heard of; that gay, heart-warming, charming shtetl on whose roofs fiddlers eternally play sentimental music has almost nothing to do with anything I remember, with the poverty-stricken, wretched little communities in which Jews eked out a living, comforting themselves with the hope that things would somehow be better one day and with their belief that there was a point to their misery."

"We travelled for miles in Liberia. I talked to hundreds of people and answered thousands of questions about Israel, many of them about Israel as the land of the Bible. A very nice young woman from the Liberian Foreign Office accompanied us, and I remember that on the last day of my visit she said very bashfully to me: 'I have an old mother to whom I explained that I would be busy all week with a visitor from Jerusalem. My mother just stared at me. "Don't you know," she said, "that there is no such place as Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in Heaven." Do you think, Mrs. Meir, that you could possibly see her for a minute and tell her about Jerusalem?' Of course, I went to meet her mother that day and took with me a little bottle of water from the Jordan River. The old woman just walked around and around me, though she never actually touched me. 'You come from Jerusalem,' she kept on saying. 'You mean, there's a *real* city, with streets and houses where *real* people live?' 'Yes, I live there,' I answered, but I don't think she believed me for a moment. It was a question that I was asked all over Africa, and I used to tell the Africans that the only thing that was heavenly about Jerusalem was that it still existed!"

"There are also lighter memories of the incessant travelling. Once, on a blustery winter morning, I arrived in Winnipeg on a train that came in early. Since I couldn't see any of the women who were supposed to meet me, I decided to go to a nearby hotel rather than wake any of the women at such an early hour. But no sooner had I unpacked than the telephone rang. A despairing voice said to me: 'Mrs. Meyerson, we are all at the station. A large delegation has come to greet you. How can I tell them that we missed you? How can I deprive them of the excitement and the enthusiasm, of the special privilege of being among the first to press your hand in welcome? They will be so disappointed! So I said, 'Don't worry. I'll be there in a few minutes.' I packed again, called a cab, and within 15 minutes was back at the station, meeting the delegation, which happily escorted me to my hostess's home."

Golda Meir, My Life

FORUM

ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE, ZIONISM AND ISRAEL



DAVID GEFFEN

Documents:

The Sacred Soil of America — A Purim Celebration on Ward's Island in 1882

"This year the festival will have peculiar significance for American Israelites, owing to the few thousand refugees who are celebrating Purim for the first time on American shores. The helpless victims of Russian persecution, exiles from home and kindred, how can they obey the traditional behest to be glad and joyful? It is the duty of the American Jew to inspire them with olden merriment and make the festival a day of joy for those tempest-tossed emigrants, by prompt and cheerful assistance. Let no sacrifice be deemed too costly, if it secure for the refugee a happy home and enable him to become a useful and independent American citizen."[1]

The editorial in the *Jewish Messenger* of New York, the week before Purim one hundred years ago, focused on the plight of "helpless victims" and "tempest-tossed emigrants." How could established American Jews, the paper asked, allow their refugee brothers and sisters not to experience at least a minimum of pleasure on this most joyous of days? Indeed, the prime purpose of assistance was not just to provide a holiday treat but to make it easier for the new arrival to become an American.

With this type of spirit infusing the Jewish community of New York, it was no wonder that special Purim festivities were planned for the three hundred Jews then on Ward's Island awaiting placement by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society.[2] Had it been just another Purim party, there would be no need to resurrect it a hundred years later. However, the event had woven into it the variegated threads of thought which were to characterize the American Jewish approach to the mass migration from Eastern Europe. This movement westward, fueled by terrible economic conditions of the Jews in Russia and by the restrictive measures against the Jews following the assassination in 1881 of Czar Alexander II, increased the number of American Jews from 280,000 in 1877 to over 4000,000 in 1925.

The letter describing the Purim celebration is found on the editorial page of the *Jewish Messenger* over the signature of

David Geffen, founder of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, is the Educational Consultant to *Gesher*, the Centers for Jewish and Zionist Study.

איש ימיני. Since this pseudonymn is taken from the genealogy of Mordecai found in the Book of Esther, it probably refers to Myer Samuel Isaacs,[3] an attorney and brother of the editor, A. S. Isaacs.[4] Founded in the late 1850s by Rabbi Samuel Myer Isaacs,[5] father of the Isaacs' brothers, the *Jewish Messenger* sought to offset the influence of Isaac Mayer Wise's *American Israelite*.[6] The *Israelite*, coming out of the midwest, espoused the Reform Jewish platform being developed by Wise through the Hebrew Union College and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The *Jewish Messenger* tended to be much more Conservative in its religious position, and supported the establishment of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Purim, interestingly, made its impact on the United States in various ways. George Washington frequently emphasized that war profiteers should be "hung on gallows five times as high as Haman's." Other American Revolutionary leaders compared the rebellion of the colonists with the armed action of the Jews in defending themselves from Haman's edict of destruction. In American Jewish life, Purim had a very festive air to it. From the 1860s on, the Purim Ball in New York was one of the grandest of celebrations.[7] The same week the refugees were entertained on Ward's Island, the wealthier Jews, in costume, danced into the wee hours of the morning at a mammoth Purim masquerade Ball, where the profits were designated for immigrant relief.

While this letter of 100 years vintage describes that Purim event, it is structured in a manner which highlights four major themes while building to a climax in which a verse from the Book of Esther is utilized. The letter begins with a noisy welcome afforded the guests by the adult refugees and the "healthy looking babies." This is followed by the festive Purim meal (*seudah*). As everyone was enjoying the repast, an American Jew was so moved by the scene that he wrote out a check of assistance — indicating as he did that these persecuted refugees were Jews as he himself. This theme reappears frequently during the period of immigration when American Jews, usually of German origin, took it upon themselves to provide for the Eastern European Jews arriving in ever-increasing numbers. True, many of the German Jews looked down upon these immigrants, but they recognized their responsibility toward them.

The second theme is found in the speech of the Christian commissioner who stressed the aspect of self-help. The Jewish refugees, he noted, have transformed a building which was in "most deplorably dilapidated condition" into one which has been so improved that he can hardly recognize it. A key point in the commissioner's presentation was that if the new arrivals took advantage of what America has to offer then their status as foreigners would quickly disappear.

The third theme is to be seen in the words of a Jewish Alderman from New York City. Initially emphasizing his relationship to them as a fellow Jew, he stressed the fact that he was also greeting them as an elected official of the city. In his opinion the ability of a Jew to rise to such a position is only possible in America. Moreover, any Jew can aspire to such an exalted status, if he but work towards it.

The fourth theme is provided by Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, the spiritual leader of Temple Emanu-El in New York.[8] Among the members of the Temple were all the

"Our Crowd" figures, German Jews, who were the leaders of American Jewish life. Contrasting the despotism of Russia with the "civilized beings" of the USA, Rabbi Gottheil challenged the new immigrants to maintain their religious beliefs. He also encouraged them to live as Jews in the highest sense of the term, which meant keeping their name "bright and unstained." By doing this, he claimed, they could demonstrate to the world what can be accomplished when Jews are free.

Accompanying Gottheil and his wife on that fateful Purim in 1882 was the poetess Emma Lazarus. Although her voice was not heard that day, she absorbed the entire scene and mingled freely with the immigrants. This was one of her numerous visits during February, March and April to Ward's Island, visits which altered her Jewish perspective. In this same period she composed her spirited defense of the arriving immigrants answering the charges that America was getting the dregs of humanity. During the first half of 1882 Miss Lazarus penned her poems, "Songs of a Semite," which dramatically identified her as an advocate for her people. The following year she wrote the poem "The New Colossus" for the Statue of Liberty concluding with the lines: "Send these the homeless tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door." Therefore, hr presence at this Purim celebration subsequently did have echoes in her writing.

The themes depicted in this letter exemplified the various aspects of the American Jewish approach to the massive immigration, which was to alter radically the face of American Jewry and, in a sense, that of world Jewry as well. On the centennial of that Purim on Ward's Island, the rereading of the description by איש ימיני will help capture the pulse of American Jewry at the outset of this major epoch in modern Jewish history.

The letter is found in the *Jewish Messenger* March 10, 1882.

Purim at Ward's Island

To the Editor: While most of our coreligionists were celebrating the feast of Purim in various ways, more than three hundred Jewish refugees on Ward's Island[9] *were not slow in imitating their more fortunate brethren. A number of friends, Rev. Mr. Kartschmaroff,*[10] *Alderman Levy,*[11] *Messrs. L. Lewisohn,*[12]*, C. Schlesinger, Katz and myself, arriving at the island, were met by our protegees in double file, in charge of the energetic Mr. Bergman, assisted by Rev. Dr. Schreiber.*[13]

After extending their welcome, consisting of three hearty cheers, we were ushered inside, and greeted again by unearthly yells, issuing from the throats of a score or more of healthy looking babies. Their enthusiasm was aroused not by their visitors so much as by the coveted good things under which the tables groaned. After hosts and guests were comfortably seated at long tables, covered with snow white linen, all heads were covered, and grace was said by Rev. Mr. Kartschmaroff.

Here an incident took place which is worth noticing. While our future citizens were busily engaged in satisfying their appetites, a born American coreligionist was equally busy writing an order for fifty dollars as a donation, with the understanding that his name not be made public, and he was so overcome by emotion that he cried like a baby, exclaiming between his sobs: "Those men, women and children were hunted down like

wolves, for no other crime than being of the same faith as myself!" It might also be mentioned that this same gentleman has already found employment for seventeen refugees, and engaged even more.

The meal over, the order to cover the heads was given, and grace again pronounced by Rev. Mr. Kartschmaroff. Now Mr. Bergman rushed in breathlessly, announcing the arrival of some more guests, and in walked the tall form of Mr. Kane, Superintendent of the Island, accompanied by two Commissioners, with their ladies. After the preliminary introduction, and partaking of refreshments, the venerable Commissioner, Mr. Husted, voluntarily offered to address the exiles.

Amongst his eloquent remarks, he said, "This building,[14] *when presented for your accommodation, was in the most deplorably dilapidated condition, but during the short time under your care, it has been so wonderfully improved, that I myself could hardly recognize it, and I hope and I trust, after a short time reaping the benefit of this glorious free country, to which a cordial welcome is extended to you by Christians as well as by Jews, you will be so thoroughly changed for the better that no one will be able to identify you as Russian exiles." Their feeling of gratitude could be easier imagined than described. Suffice to say, that more than one had his face buried in his hands, shedding tears as if his heart would break. All they could do was to test the strength of their lungs by hearty cheers.*

He was followed by Alderman Levy, who made a forcible address, of which the following is a synopsis: "I present myself to you on this important day, not only as your Jewish brother, but also as a representative of the municipal government of this metropolis. While in your bigoted country you have never met with a government officer, who at the same time could be proud of his Jewish religion, let me tell you, my friends, this country offers you the same opportunity, if you will only be honest, industrious men. Your religion will be no obstacle in the way to reach the highest position."

Their faces being lit up with happy thoughts — bright anticipations no doubt of becoming rulers of the Union, equally appropriate addresses were given by Mr. Lewisohn, Rev. Mr. Kartschmaroff, Dr. Finkelstein, and Rev. Dr. Schreiber, who seasoned his remarks with numerous tidbits of Talmudic and Midrashic sayings. At last the name of Mr. Bergman was loudly called, but he was nowhere to be found. After a vigorous search, he was discovered arguing with a little fellow of about four winters, according to the Russian calendar, trying to convince his young friend that by climbing over a certain chair he was in danger of splitting his Russian head. Mr. Bergman was unceremoniously seized by half a dozen strong arms, bodily carried to the center of the room, and repeatedly lifted up in the air to the delight of the crowing babes, and the same fate was shared by Secretary Kursheedt.[15]

But in the midst of this tumult, Rev. Dr. Gottheil,[16] *accompanied by his wife and Miss Emma Lazarus,*[17] *appeared on the scene, and without hesitating he mounted the long bench, and delivered a touching and eloquent address. His closing remarks were, "My brothers and sisters, I would never believe that any inducement on earth would tempt me to leave my house on such a day; but the body had to yield to the wish of the soul, which desired to share in your celebration of the great feast. Let me tell you as you were persecuted by the despotic ruler of an*

intolerant people for clinging to your faith, here you are amongst civilized beings; that not only are you entitled to remain Jews, you could glorify in that name: therefore I implore you to keep that sacred name bright and unstained, that you may be a pride not only to your coreligionists but to the world at large, to show how much you can accomplish when the yoke of bigotry and intolerance is lifted from your shoulders."

Dr. Gottheil having desired to hear some Russian songs, these were cheerfully rendered by a chorus of a dozen pleasant voices, and when asked for the Russian national hymn, they answered with the words of the psalmist, slightly altered: "How can we sing the desecrated song on the sacred soil of America?"[18]

To see how our Russian friends enjoyed their double celebration of Purim, besides rejoicing that their ancestors had escaped the persecution of the ancient Haman, feeling that even they themselves escaped the persecution of the modern Haman, the Czar of all Russians: it might well be said "The Jews had light, and joy, and gladness and honor." Esther viii, 16

איש ימיני

N.Y., 7 March, 1882
From the Jewish Messenger March, 1882

NOTES

1. *Jewish Messenger*, 3 March 1882.
2. The Society was established at the end of November 1881 and disbanded in 1884. The leading figures in forming HIAS were American Jews of Germanic origin. Only a few months later, in February 1882, the Hebrew Emigrant Auxiliary Society was started by Eastern European Jews already living in America and the group was headed by Michael Heilprin.
3. Myer Samuel Isaacs (1841-1904), a judge in the marine court of New York city for over 20 years, was a founder of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, and helped establish the agricultural school at Woodbine, New Jersey. He wrote for the *Jewish Messenger* under various pseudonymns. One of them, איש ימיני, related to his name Mordechai.
4. Abram S. Isaacs was born in 1852 and was professor of Hebrew and German at New York University. He served as editor of the *Jewish Messenger* from 1878-1903.
5. Samuel Myer Isaacs (1804-1878) established the *Jewish Messenger* in 1857 and was the editor until his death. An ally of Rabbi Sabato Morais, founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Isaacs was a spokesman for Conservative Judaism in the U.S.A.
6. The paper was started in 1854 in Cincinatti by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and was edited by him until his death in 1900.
7. Philip Goodman, "The Purim Association of the City of New York (1862-1902)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (1950-51), pp. 135-172.
8. The Temple was founded on the Lower East Side in 1845 and moved to its present site at 5th Avenue and 65th St. in 1928.
9. The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society sent to Ward's Island all those immigrants who had no specific trade and for whom it was seeking relocation in cities and towns outside of New York. In 1882 2,617 immigrants were sent by the Society to over 150 communities in the United States. Zosa Szajkowski, "The Attitude of American Jews to East European Jewish Immigration (1881-1893)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* XL (1950-1951), pp. 272-273.
10. Edward Kartschmaroff was born in Russia in 1843, immigrating to the United States in 1873. For three years he was the cantor for Congregation Shaare Rachamim, and then he moved to Congregation B'nai Jeshurun which he served into the twentieth century.
11. Ferdinand Levy (1843-1923) was born in Milwaukee and fought for the Union in the Civil

War. He became a lawyer and moved to New York. After moving to New York, he was elected an alderman, coroner, registrar, and commissioner of taxes and assessment of New York City.

12. Leonard Lewisohn (1847-1902) made his mark by helping to develop copper mining in the United States. With William Rockefeller he formed the United Metals Selling Corporation a few years before his death.
13. Moses A. Schreiber was born in 1841 in Kovno. He studied privately with the Hebrew novelist Abraham Mapu. An active Hebraist, he published essays in the *Measset* of the *Sephath Eber* in New York.
14. After the founding of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society in 1881, a former lunatic asylum on Ward's Island was turned over to the Society to house the immigrants. It was known as the Schiff Building since Jacob Schiff funded its refurnishing. Postal and Koppman, *American Jewish landmarks* (New York: 1977), Vol. 1, p. 344.
15. Manuel Augustus Kursheedt was born in 1840 in New York. After serving as the secretary of the Russian Emigrant Relief Fund he became the managing secretary of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society. He was one of the moving forces behind the planning of the Purim celebration.
16. Gustav Gottheil (1827-1903) came to the United States to be the associate rabbi at Temple Emanu-El and within a year he took over the pulpit, which he held until 1901. Under his spiritual leadership it became the congregation of all of the elite New York Jewry. An ardent Zionist he helped found the American Zionist movement, and his son, Professor Richard Gottheil, was president of the Federation of American Zionists during its early years.
17. Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) was born in New York to a Sephardic family. An outstanding poetess, she was quite assimilated with very little Jewish sensitivity, until she was awakened by the plight of the refugees arriving on American shores from the persecutions in Russia and other countries.
During 1882 Emma Lazarus wrote her most significant Jewish works climaxed by the *Epistles to the Hebrews*, 16 essays calling for united Jewish action to help the persecuted Jews in Europe, for the transformation of Jewish education, and for the restoration of Palestine as the Jewish homeland. Her presence at this Purim celebration was another one of the steps leading to the revival of her Jewish spirit.
18. This is a play on Psalm 137:4.

FORUM

ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE, ZIONISM AND ISRAEL

В БУДУЩЕМ ГОДУ
В ИЕРУСАЛИМЕ

לשנה הבאה בירושלים

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

ANATOLY SHCHARANSKY

Documents

THE WEDDING DAY OF THE JEWISH NATION TO THE JEWISH LAND:

A Letter from Jerusalem — 1922

DAVID GEFFEN

THE LETTER OF Dr. M. J. Wissotsky reprinted here was written on one of the monumental days in the history of the Mandate. On September 11, 1922, the date of the letter, the Mandate officially went into effect and Herbert Samuel was sworn in as the High Commissioner of Palestine in the presence of Field Marshall Allenby, Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, and 700 spectators. The Arab populace declared a general strike to mark the day, and all non-Jewish shops in Palestine were closed. Herbert Samuel in his acceptance speech called for a revival of the Jewish people and the Arab people. Catching the spirit, the *Ha'aretz* of September 12 described the event in this fashion. "Today Eretz Yisrael is proclaimed to all the world for it has ceased to be what it has been for hundreds of years a province ruled by a variety of foreign governments. Today a national homeland is born; today the State of Israel is born."

Dr. M. J. Wissotsky was one of the pioneer West Coast Zionists having settled in Los Angeles around 1910. He became active in the *shekel* campaigns in the Los Angeles area shortly thereafter, and he led the drive to enroll California Jewry in the Zionist Organization of America during World War I. An outspoken advocate for the establishment of the Keren Hayesod in America, Wissotsky sided with the Weizmann-Lipsky faction at the Cleveland convention in 1921 and helped to defeat the Brandeis-Mack forces. Following the convention he was appointed by Louis Lipsky to the new National Executive Committee of the ZOA.

In the winter of 1922 Dr. Wissotsky and his wife decided to go to Palestine not only to visit his brother, the noted dentist Dr. Abraham Wissotsky of Tel Aviv, but also to see Eretz Yisrael at first hand. As this letter clearly indicates, Dr. Wissotsky fell in love with the country. However, in spite of his efforts and his brother's encouragement, he was not able to find a position and returned to Los Angeles in 1923.

The letter itself was sent to Wissotsky's best friend in American Zionist circles, William Topkis of Wilmington Delaware. Topkis (1878–1925) had become acquainted with Wissotsky in 1914 when he first visited California. From that time on they were not just friends but Zionist comrades in arms. In 1921 they even contemplated going into the canning business together in Palestine, but the economic conditions were not right for such a venture.

William Topkis and his brother Louis

Dr. David Geffen, founder of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, is the Educational Director of the Zalman Shazar Center in Jerusalem.

Topkis, along with their other brothers, were the owners of the Topkis Underwear Company of Wilmington, the third largest underwear company in the United States at the beginning of the 1920's. They were also two of Louis Lipsky's strongest allies, and he followed their advice closely on all matters relating to the Keren Hayesod and other Zionist financial considerations. William Topkis had been planning a trip to Palestine in any case, but Wissotsky's letter moved him to make affirmative decision on this matter. At the beginning of February 1923 he took his wife Vi and his daughter Esther to Palestine for a four month stay. While in the country he opened, at his own expense, a tourist aid service, the American Information Bureau; and he directed a "propaganda" film for the Jewish National Fund. (His diary of that trip will be published by this author in *Cathedra,* a publication of the Ben Zvi Institute, in the fall of 1978.)

The letter itself is to be found in the William Topkis papers in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware housed in the Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington Delaware.

Jerusalem, 11/9/22

Mr. William Topkis
Wilmington, De.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Topkis,

Thank you for your big and good letter. We read it with great pleasure.

We remain for good in Palestine, and this is how it happened. We left America for few months only to visit my brother in Tel Aviv,[1] whom I did not see for 17 years also to visit Eretz Yisrael which I did not see for almost 2000 years. But when I came to Jerusalem all my plans changed. It was just the 20th of July, the mandate days. After I walked around for a few days on these narrow, crooked, hilly, stony, funny and in the same time most wonderful streets where every stone speaks to you of our forefathers, after I lived over on these streets the anxiety of the mandate, which we got, and of a pogrom, to which we were prepared and which happily did not realize, after those few days in Jerusalem Mrs. Wissotsky and myself both felt, that we can not leave this place, we must live here whatever hapens (sic) to us.

And so we are here for good, till we die, I hope. I wish to God you shall come over here, as I am sure you will feel the same you.

I know we are going to have a hard strugle (sic) here, as it is very hard to establish a medical practice here with our oversupply of physicians, but it does not matter: at this moment I hear shooting of guns; Herbert Samuel on the next hill (ar asofim (sic) olive mountain) is announcing officially about the mandate and about the Palestine constitution. A military band is playing. I have a feeling that today is the wedding day of the Jewish nation to the

[1] Dr. Abraham Wissotsky (1883–1949) was born in Ukraine, and he studied dentistry at the University of Chicago. After he received his degree, he returned to Russia where he married and moved to Siberia. In addition to his dental work, he also started to write stories in Russian, and he was befriended by Maxim Gorky. He and his family moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1920, taking up residence in Tel Aviv. He established special dental clinics for children, served as president of the dental society, and developed a special treatment for pyorrehrea. He wrote a number of novels in Russian, some of which were translated into Hebrew.

Jewish land.[2] And I have the chance to see it in the very Jerusalem, and my heart is full of joy. I am thankful to God for that chance.

About the land—what is the use writing you? Come and see it. It pays to spend money and effort to live over here those deep feelings, which the coming and staying here creates. We read, in your letter of your intention to come here in November. If only you can do it, do it now. You worked enough for our cause to deserve that pleasure. The day, when we will meet you here will be a glad day for both of us, for Mrs. Wissotsky and for myself. It is better on the sea in summer. But we crossed it in February and we did not suffer too much. There are thousand of things I would like to talk to you about the needs of our land, but we will do it, when you will come here.

Times are bad: teachers of schools did not get salary for four months, Zionist office workers for three months. Lots of people are thus affected and the land suffers. All this—because America does not give enough money. Till I came here I did not realize how much the existence of Palestine depends on America. Yes, our work of schnorring for dollars was the holiest work done for Zion. We shall not get downhearted of our work. There is no more wonderful summer climate than in Jerusalem better than in Los Angeles and still all say, that Zfath (sic) is much better. The fall and winter is first class in Tel Aviv. Still they say it is much better in Tiberias. The spring here is a dream everywhere. You can stop rushing from Florida to Los Angeles hunting for a good place, you have it all here and still better inside of a 2–3 hours ride. There is nothing sweeter than bathing in the sea in Chaifa, living on the cool and breezy Carmel, where from our bothing in the sea in Haifa, living on the only place which is still better than our Eretz Israel. I am filling myself up each day with grapes, the equal of which I never tasted. Everything is good here except conditions of Jewish life. It is up to us to make that good and I am sure we will make it good too.

When you will come here you will like it all, because I know you like it already, before you saw it. This is why I want you here.

I read with great satisfaction of my reelection to the National Executive Com. Thank you again. I wrote to Lipsky [3] that I remain in Jerusalem, but I could be of service to the National Executive at it's Palestine end, giving it all necessary information from first hand sources and helping them to organize here anything they want in Palestine. And there are lots of things to organize. For instance, the pilgrimage of last Pesach (organized by Hyman) did not benefit Jews here at all. Cook and others was directing them here and were intentionally boicoting (sic) Jewish drivers of autos, Jewish places etcetera.[4] There are many

[2] This ceremony took place at Government House on the Mount of Olives at 3:30 in the afternoon, September 11, 1922. A seventeen gun salute was sounded after Herbert Samuel became the High Commissioner.

[3] Louis Lipsky was the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Zionist Organization of America in 1922. He was the leading figure in American Zionism at that time, and both Wissotsky and Topkis were his close allies.

[4] Cook's Travel Agency had a definite anti-Jewish policy in these early years of the Mandate. The Agency assigned Arab guides to Jewish tourists by-passing the few Jews who had just been licensed as tourist guides.

other such instances I am going to organize all Americans here in a Zionistic lodge for helping those coming over here with information and direction.

If you will see Lipsky, please talk over this matter. I am ready to do anything Zionistic to help American Zionists to come and settle here. We need them badly, especially the men with money and enterprise.

I was very glad to see in the reports of the conference that honors were given to whom they were due: your brother as treasurer [5] and you on the committee of peace, the most holy and honorable committee.[6] oYu have a hard task before you. But I am sure you will succeed much with your tact and patients (sic).

You express a desire in your letter to help me in any possible way. Thank you very much for that. It is my general rule not to abuse friends and in this way to keep friendship alive.

But here is one matter I would like to write to you.

Malaria is the great trouble of Palestine. It was the dream of my life to do scientific work on malaria and moskitoes (sic)—the agent of malaria and thus help to improve our country. This was one of the reasons why I decided to remain in Palestine. At once I started to work here on this scientific question. Then I found that with the limited facilities at my command I can not do much.

Just recently was here a committee from America with Dr. Ratnov at the head which is going to establish here a micro-bilogical institute to investigate scientifically sicknesses here as a beginning of a University for the money of the American Jewish physicians. The committee was here only a couple of days and I had no chance to see them being out of town. They are going to bring from Europe a first class scientific man as the head of this institute, which will do just the thing I intended to do, but in a much larger scale with great facilities and probably with great results to the health of the country and the position and glory of the Jewish name here.

And with this Jewish institute in Jerusalem I have a very great desire to be connected as that would give me all the facilities to do the scientific work of my dreams.

Therefore I even bother you about it, How that can be done, I don't know, whether through Lipsky or through Dr. Ratnow,[7] in the form of some letter about it to the head of this institute (I don't know who that will be yet). Anyhow if you could help me in that matter it would be a great service to me. It is not the question of big salaries for me at all, but a chance to work scientifically for the benefit and glory of myself and of our land, that gives me courage to bother you. It would give me a chance to do better the work I started already myself here.

[5] Louis Topkis became national treasurer of the ZOA in June 1922 and served in this capacity for three years. He was the ZOA's official representative at the opening of the Hebrew University in April 1925.

[6] This committee established at the ZOA convention in 1922 was set up to patch up the differences between the Brandeis forces and the Lipsky forces. William Topkis was one of the instigators of this action since he realized that American Zionist movement needed the cooperation of the Brandeis group.

[7] Dr. Nathan Ratnoff was the president of the American Jewish Physician's Committee. In the summer of 1922 he and two other physicians were sent by the Committee to Palestine to study the feasability of establishing a medical faculty at the Hebrew University.

I hope your strikes are over and good times are again in America.

Rents for houses are impossibly high here. The Arabs own the houses and squeeze the life out of the Jew. A good man building here houses could safely invest with an income of 10% and more. People would bless him, as here is a great lack of houses.

I was told that Goldwins contemplates sending here a cast for taking some pictures here.[8] Is it so? This would open another possibility for Palestine whose great sunshine would become a source of riches.

I do hope to God that you will be here in November. Then take my advice: take along Mrs. Topkis, your little girl and anything that is dear to you: if you decide here to remain you will have everything with you.

Well you asked for a big letter, now you get more than you wanted and you will have some job reading it.

Heartiest greetings to Mrs. Topkis from Mrs. Wissotsky and from myself. We hope to see you soon here. Please let us know aforehand, even by telegram if necessary, what preparations of make for you.

With Zion greetings
Yours truly

Dr. M. Wissotsky
Consul St. Jerusalem Palestine

[8] Samuel Goldwyn formed a partnership in 1921 with members of the DuPont family and their associate William Topkis for the purpose of establishing Goldwyn Pictures in Hollywood. With this studio he planned to produce "a better quality of picture for less money." Because of this association Goldwyn was convinced by Topkis to go to Palestine to film a Biblical picture. Unfortunately financial reverses prevented Goldwyn from bringing this project to fruition.